

Giving the President "fast track" authority to reorganize the intelligence agencies, undermining the reforms recommended by the 9/11 Commission;

Giving the President authority to bypass Senate confirmation of the Director of the CIA and other key intelligence and defense officials, weakening congressional oversight;

Giving Federal law enforcement officials new authority to deport foreign nationals, revoke visas, and deny asylum without judicial review;

Creation of new national databases of drivers licenses, birth certificates, and criminal histories, raising civil liberties and privacy concerns; and

Expansion of the authority of the Justice Department by relaxing grand jury secrecy requirements and increasing its ability to conduct secret surveillance.

I serve on the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, and it troubles me that while that body received a referral for markup, the leadership has chose not to schedule such a hearing. The very committee that would presumably hold the most jurisdiction over this matter deferred its opportunity to make this legislation better. That does not sit well with my colleagues on this side of the aisle and it does not sit well with the families of the victims of 9/11—it does not sit well with the American people.

Furthermore, while the September 11 Commission has set forth its bipartisan suggestion for rebuilding and improvement, we cannot even move legislation that authorizes homeland security spending through a markup by the main committee of jurisdiction. These issues are indicative of a body that has its priorities misplaced.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition and tribute to the families of the 9/11 victims, there should never be a price limitation placed on effectively securing the homeland. Nor should solid legislation be ignored or thwarted in carrying out the will of the American people. For this reason, I fully support the goals set forth in the Shays-Maloney proposal that was not made in order by this committee. I also fully support the Menendez amendment that has been endorsed by the 9/11 Commission and embodies the provisions found in the Collins/Lieberman proposal, S. 2845 and the McCain/Lieberman proposal, S. 2774.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 4200,
RONALD W. REAGAN NATIONAL
DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2005

SPEECH OF

HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 8, 2004

Mr. LANGEVIN. Mr. Speaker, as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am pleased to speak in support of the conference report before us. Chairman HUNTER and Ranking Member SKELTON deserve great credit for negotiating a bill that will provide our military—and the men and women who serve in it—the resources they need to keep America strong in the 21st century. It is always a daunting task to craft legislation that balances the needs of our services, and such an effort is

even more challenging during a time of military conflict. The chairman and ranking member have succeeded admirably in this endeavor, and the product before us today is a fine example of careful craftsmanship and bipartisan cooperation. We are proud of our men and women in uniform, and we must ensure that they are given the resources necessary to succeed in their mission.

H.R. 4200 recognizes the importance of our service men and women in the field and around the world and demonstrates the appreciation of Congress through the provision of a 3.5% pay increase for military personnel in FY 2005 and a permanent increase in the family-separation allowance and imminent-danger pay. I am particularly pleased that the measure extends TRICARE benefits to nonactive duty reservists. Our Reserve component has served the Nation professionally and valiantly even though they and their families have often had to make sacrifices. Providing enhanced access to TRICARE will provide greater stability to reservist families and will ensure that we do not lose qualified servicemembers because of insufficient access to health care.

The conference report also addresses several major problems that my colleagues on the committee and I have been working to solve. Our committee and our colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the House have fought for an end to a current flaw in our survivor benefits system that penalizes military spouses. For too long, military spouses have witnessed their survivor benefits drop by more than one-third once reaching the age of 62. Comparable civilian plans provide survivors a lifetime annuity of 50–55 percent of retired pay and protect against a drop in annuity at age 62. As a cosponsor of the Military Survivor Benefits Improvement Act, I have supported efforts to repeal this unfair burden and am pleased that this legislation would phase out from October 2005 to March 2008 the current offset under the Survivor Benefit Plan, and increase the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 years or older. Additionally, the agreement expedites last year's concurrent receipt improvements by authorizing full concurrent receipt for disabled military retirees rated 100% disabled.

I am, however, disappointed, that the conference report scaled back the provisions that I offered with Congressman JIM COOPER during committee consideration that would ensure greater equity and efficiency of the Department of Defense's contracting process. The agreement appears to close loopholes that have allowed the Department of Defense to avoid Congressionally mandated competition requirements and provides limited appeal rights for government employees to challenge contract decisions. Yet it falls short in other areas intended to guarantee taxpayer savings and improved efficiency in DoD contracting procedures. I look forward to working with the committee to implement H.R. 4200's provisions and to address other shortcomings in this area.

Overall, this legislation is a well-balanced approach to the needs of our Nation's military, and I commend the chairman, ranking member, and my colleagues on the committee for a fine work product.

HONORING MARY MILLS

HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Saturday, October 9, 2004

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I want to take time today to recognize someone who has been a true public servant in Williamson County, Tennessee. Few communities are fortunate enough to have someone like Mary Mills. But we in Tennessee have been blessed by her hard work and dedication for years now.

Williamson County Commissioner Mary Mills has consistently and without fanfare worked to improve her community. As a former educator and an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Commissioner Mills has been a leader in everything she does.

This week she's being recognized by the United Community Resource Foundation with a Lifetime Achievement Award, and I join the people of Williamson County in thanking Mary for her dedication.

IN SUPPORT OF BORDER
BINATIONAL HEALTH WEEK

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Saturday, October 9, 2004

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of an important event that I am proud to say will soon take place in my congressional district of El Paso, Texas—Border Binational Health Week. Through the efforts of federal, state, and local stakeholders and community members in the United States and Mexico, Border Binational Health Week will raise awareness and strengthen our commitment to overcoming border health challenges.

The border is a very dynamic region and a gateway for diseases such as gastrointestinal illnesses, a tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, and a disproportionate number of border residents suffer from chronic illnesses like cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. It is impossible to stop the spread of diseases at the border, so we must work together, bi-nationally, to address health concerns and combat illness. In short, Mexico and the United States must be partners in achieving our common goal of solving health problems along the U.S.-Mexico border.

As part of that critical effort, I am pleased to announce that Border Binational Health Week will be held from October 11–17, 2004, and is being sponsored by the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission. The Commission, along with many partners on both sides of the border, has worked diligently in developing the agenda for this extremely important event.

The theme for Border Binational Health Week is "Families in Action for Health." Some of the many topics to be highlighted are improving access to health care, reducing health disparities, and increasing immunization rates. The week will also include community mobilization efforts, informational presentations, policy forums, models of excellence programs, and health careers and professional exchanges—all illustrating the steps to a healthier border and advancing the goals of the Healthy Border 2010 initiative.